

BOOK REVIEW

ROBERT W. LEBLING AND DONNA PEPPERDINE. 2006. **Natural Remedies of Arabia**. (ISBN 9781905299027, hbk.).

Stacey International Publishers, 128 Kensington Church Street, London, W8 4BH, United Kingdom.

(Orders: www.stacey-international.co.uk, info@stacey-international.co.uk, +44 207 221 7166, +44 207 792 9288 fax). \$55.00, 210 pp., color photographs, glossary, indexes, reference list, 10 3/4" x 12 1/2".

This book provides a wealth of information on the ethnobotany and pharmacognosy of the peoples of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. It describes in detail 62 herbs, spices, oils, and minerals from the region, filling two to four pages per substance with factoids, historical nuggets, traditional uses, academic research notes, and family remedies. In particular, the family remedy portion for each plant was gleaned from "a questionnaire distributed throughout the Arabian Peninsula in 2002. The questionnaire...asked families to explain how they...use various herbs, spices and other substances in natural healing." Twenty-seven additional plants are also discussed but in much less detail and with few pictures.

The substances described in detail are: aloe vera, alum, anise, arak, arta, arugula, asafetida, banana, basil, black seed, caraway, cardamom, castor oil plant, chamomile, cinnamon, cloves, coffee, coriander, cress, cucumber, cumin, dates, fennel, fenugreek, frankincense, garlic, germander, ginger, hasawi rice, henna, herbal waters, hibiscus, honey, incense, lavender, lemon balm, lime, mahaleb cherry, mangrove, mastic, mint, myrrh, nakhwa, neem, nettle, petroleum, pomegranate, purslane, rose, saffron, sage, samh, sarcocol, sidr, tarthuth, thyme, desert truffles, turmeric, walnut bark, wormwood (sheeh), wormwood (bu'aythiran), and yarrow. The following are also described briefly: acacia, apple of Sodom, black nightshade, blond psyllium, caper, caralluma, cleome, colocynth, corn poppy, desert bugloss, dogbane, dwarf mallow, gum arabic, harmel, heliotrope, jericho rose, lemon grass, milkweed, myrtle, rat-tail plantain, safflower, senna, simple-leaved bean caper, smooth sow-thistle, spurge, tamarisk, and withania.

Immediately following the natural remedy descriptions is a Natural Beauty section that discusses Middle Eastern practices regarding natural hair care, skin care, and cosmetics, as well as uses for henna and mahaleb perfume. This section is presented in bullet form, with the text written in first person, presumably drawn straight from the questionnaire responses mentioned above. A Recipes section is also included, with 29 pages of instructions for the preparation of traditional drinks, salads, soup, jam, dips, breakfast, desserts, main dishes, and spice mixtures, each using one or more of the previously discussed items.

The book concludes with the following sections: Glossary of Herbal Medicinal Terms, Index of Common Ailments, Bibliography & References, Index by Latin Name, and Index by Arabic Name. The Index of Common Ailments in particular serves as a handy quick reference to all the medical complaints addressed in the book.

All in all, *Natural Remedies of Arabia* was a delightful read from which I learned much about cultures far different than my own. If I ever have the privilege to travel in that part of the world, I will be sure to visit an herbal medicine shop to explore better in person this fascinating industry.—M. Brooke Byerley, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, 500 East 4th Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4025, U.S.A.